

Population Health Matters

Reflections from the International Union for Health Promotion and Health Education (IUHPE) World Conference on Health Promotion and Education, Pattaya, Thailand

Every three years the International Union for Health Promotion and Health Education (IUHPE) holds a world conference. This past August, the 21st World Conference took place in Pattaya, Thailand with a theme of “Best Investments for Health.” The conference drew over 2100 people from 80 countries and offered a unique opportunity for participants from many different sectors and cultures to share in a collaborative learning process.¹

Although supported by the Thai Ministry of Health, the conference was organized by the Thai Health Promotion Foundation (*ThaiHealth*), an independent state agency funded by a 2% surcharge tax on tobacco and alcohol. The Foundation, founded in 2001 has generated funds of approximately

\$60 million annually to support over 1000 Thai evidenced-based health promotion policies and activities across a range of multi-sectorial partners. The World Health Organization has recognized this unique private/public partnership to develop public health promotion planning, implementation, and evaluation initiatives through a stable government health earmarked funding mechanism.²

The conference embodied the unique spirit and philosophy of Southeast Asia with health defined and measured by physical, mental, social, and spiritual indicators of *health and happiness* such as the Gross National Happiness Index from Bhutan.³ That conference *spirit* was modeled through

service and cultural experiences imbedded into the conference. For example we were able to visit a local orphanage and school for deaf children.

I presented some of our local and national public health research and practice in health literacy and policy and advocacy at the conference^{4,5} but clearly learned much more from our international colleagues regarding true community engagement and health promotion that will not be soon forgotten. ■

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